

File Argentina

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June 29, 1977

Review of the Human Rights Situation in Argentina

Argentine authorities have become increasingly sensitive to human rights criticism and have responded with several conciliatory gestures. There is little solid evidence, however, of any real effort to correct the worst abuses. There are no indications, furthermore, of a halt to the continuing physical annihilation of suspected terrorist combatants by the security forces.

The measures that the government has adopted to make it appear more responsive to human rights concerns include:

- official recognition that abuses have occurred and toleration of broader public discussion of human rights matters;
- suppression of the spectacular exploitation of the anti-Semitic and political overtones of the "Graiver Affair";
- promises to investigate the cases of some 2,000 reported "disappearances"; and
- measures announced on June 14 in anticipation of the June 16 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD) votes on Argentine loan requests, including: stepped-up prisoner releases, trials in nearly 1,000 subversion cases, restrictions on an anti-Semitic publication, and restudy of the possible restoration of the suspended constitutional right of state-of-siege prisoners to leave the country.

While encouraging, the foregoing are only image-enhancing moves. They do nothing about such fundamental violations of rights as arbitrary and prolonged detention without charges, torture, and murder. In the meantime:

- "disappearances" continue;
- suspected terrorists get harsh treatment, including psychological and physical torture--

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and murder in the case of terrorist combatants;

--state-of-siege detention, which was previously reserved for alleged subversives, is now being employed in cases involving so-called economic subversion, corruption, administrative malfeasance, and violations of political censorship regulations; detention procedures regularly disregard due process, and detainees are frequently roughed up and denied access to lawyers and family; and

--anti-Semitism, while not a government policy, continues to be manifested--most recently when threats forced the representative of the American Jewish Committee (an Argentine citizen) and his family to flee Argentina.

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 some government officials are attempting to curb flagrant abuses:

--Federal Police Chief Ojeda reportedly is trying to tighten command and control over his 30,000-member force with a view to eliminating unauthorized police actions.

--A program is said to have been instituted through which "low-level terrorists"--those not directly responsible for severe damage or bodily harm--are permitted to surrender, exchanging information for guarantees of physical safety and fair treatment; and

--President Videla reportedly intends to (a) end illegal detention for economic crimes and unauthorized political and labor activity by late June, and (b) press for an end to the illegal detention of terrorists.

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There are no indications, however, that security personnel will desist from the systematic elimination of suspected terrorist combatants. President Videla is either unable or unwilling to press his corps commanders and security chiefs on this matter.

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Concurrence:


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FOIA(b) (3) - 50 USC 3024(i) (1) -
Intelligence Sources and Methods

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June 29, 1977

File Uruguay

Review of the Human Rights Situation in Uruguay

Uruguay's human rights situation is characterized less by a persistent pattern of frequent violations than by (a) its refusal to release political prisoners, and (b) the attitudes of Uruguayan authorities toward human rights matters, in general.

The two most recent reported human rights abuses are:

- a December 1976 police round-up of an unknown number of allegedly leftist political sympathizers in a provincial town; although confirmation is lacking, two detainees probably were killed; and
- the March 1977 detention on subversion charges of 10 members of the Mutualista Israelita, a Jewish reading group described by the Israeli Ambassador in Montevideo as a "leftist institution." Although seven detainees have since been released, three more members of the same organization have been arrested. There have been no reports of mistreatment or anti-Semitic overtones.

Accurate figures are unavailable, but it is conservatively estimated that at least 2,000 political prisoners are being held as a result of earlier government actions.

Despite the relative infrequency of recent human rights incidents, it is clear that the Uruguayan Government is greatly concerned with anti-Communism and internal security considerations and is prepared to use harsh, repressive tactics at the slightest provocation.

Government leaders have assumed an increasingly unyielding posture in response to criticism. Their resistance to a visit by the Inter-American Human Rights Commission manifests this attitude, as did the actions and statements of Uruguayan representatives at the recently concluded OAS General Assembly in Grenada. Public reiteration of this posture will make it difficult for the Uruguayan Government to change its human rights policies without seeming to acquiesce in the face of external pressure.

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